

The Contribution of Universities to Racial Justice

Hosted by the Society for Research in Higher Education South West Network, the International Centre for Higher Education Management (University of Bath), and the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa).

Wednesday 1 July 2020. 14h00 to 15.30 GMT via Zoom

Global protests in response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police have refocused attention on racism around the world. The Black Lives Matter movement, highlighting how the lives of black people are jeopardised by racism and calling for the sustained transformation of our communities, has gained international momentum and intersectional solidarity. Racial and other inequalities are also replicated within universities. This seminar focuses on the ways in which higher education contributes to racial and other injustices and the possibilities for universities to contribute to social justice through decolonising and transforming the university. The seminar will be chaired by Professor Rajani Naidoo who will open the seminar after the two presentations to questions and further discussion.

Presenter Abstracts

Decolonising the Neoliberal University: Is it Possible?

Foluke Ifejoba Adebisi

Decolonising the university entails identifying, unveiling and interrupting persistent remnants of empire, racism and coloniality within academic practices and structures. Decolonisation repositions colonialism (which erases the historical and geographic constituents embedded in epistemology) as foundational to the current state and study of the world. By acknowledging these epistemic absences, decolonisation offers alternative ways to think about the effects of power differentials in knowledge production, transmission and exchange and the potential to disrupt racialized, epistemic hegemonies. This presentation argues that within a neoliberal university, attempts at decolonisation run the risk of being co-opted for performative tick-boxing and numbers-based diversity schemes that maintain and entrench the status quo. A neoliberal university is signified by: regular inspections and auditing according to un-decolonised criteria; fees and migratory structures that keep out citizens of the Global South except for the extremely advantaged; empty promises of social mobility to internal disadvantaged populations; competitive research frameworks that privilege research ratings over the actual global value of the research; treating students as consumers and degrees as individual investments. Considering the impossibility of the master's tools dismantling the master's house, the presentation questions whether it is appropriate to look for alternatives to hegemonic knowledge practices outside or within the neoliberal university for truly disruptive decolonisation.

Racism's Knowledge, Critical Hope and the Transformation of the University

Andre Keet

Reflecting on the work of the recently established Research Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation to support the change agenda of Nelson Mandela University, this presentation focuses on critical hope and the possibilities for transformation resident in the conversation between Africanisation and decolonisation. These deliberations link up with the Chair's mandate to frame its work within the concept of an African-purposed curriculum in view of the current debates about the decolonisation of the university in South Africa. This is a daunting project because the very terms of Africanisation and decolonisation appear to be prefigured in knowledge that belongs to racism which steers not only our socio-economic reality; but also our epistemic imaginations. Against the backdrop of the current focus on racism across the world and the racialised impact of COVID-19, this talk also reflects on the production of racism in the academy through the prism of racism's knowledge.

Presenter Biographies



Dr Foluke Ifejola Adebisi is a Senior Lecturer at the Law School, University of Bristol whose scholarship focuses on decolonial thought in legal education. She is also co-designer of a Law and Race unit, one of the very few of its kind in the UK. She convened the first 'Decolonisation and the Law' conference at the University of Bristol. Her decolonial scholarship, which is pedagogical as well as jurisprudential, examines what happens at the intersection of legal education, law, society and a history of changing ideas of what it means to be human. Foluke is particularly interested in academic concerns that arise from ensuring equality, inclusion and diversity within teaching practice in law and how these intersect with environmental degradation, global inequality and the potential for imagining an egalitarian future for humanity. In recognition of her work, in October 2018, Foluke was included in the Bristol BAME Powerlist 2018 - A list of Bristol's 100 most inspiring people from BAME backgrounds. An emerging though leader, she is also the founder of Forever Africa Conference and Events (FACE), a Pan-African interdisciplinary conference hosted in Bristol. She blogs about her scholarship, pedagogy and interrelated ideas on her website 'Foluke's African Skies' at <https://FolukeAfrica.com>



Professor André Keet is Research Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation at Nelson Mandela University; and is the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio of the University. He is a former Visiting Professor at the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University, UK and the 2018 Marsha Lilien Gladstein Visiting Professor of Human Rights at the University of Connecticut. Andre is the current Chairperson of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Higher Education Transformation in South Africa and has served as the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission and as Commissioner on the Commission for Gender Equality. He is a former member of the Council on Higher Education and the Higher Education Quality Committee. His research focuses on four areas: critical university studies; higher education transformation; social justice and education; and human rights, democracy and citizenship education.

This event is part of the SRHE's South West network, which is convened by Professor Rajani Naidoo (University of Bath) and Dr Lisa Lucas (University of Bristol) in collaboration with the International Centre for Higher Education Management (University of Bath) and the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa)